UNITED
NATIONS

DP

Governing Council
of the United Nations
Development Programme

Distr.
GENERAL

DP/1992/14
30 April 1992

Original: ENGLISH

Thirty-ninth session
4-29 May 1992, Geneva
Item 3 of the provisional agenda

PROGRAMME LEVEL ACTIVITIES

Environment and development:

UNDP and the new emerging needs of sustainable development

Report of the Administrator

Summary

The present report is submitted to inform the Governing Council of the activities of the United Nations Development Programme in response to the demands for an enhanced role of the Programme in the areas of environment and sustainable development. It also outlines a programme of support to developing countries in the planned follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

GE.92-61372/9591a

92-22207

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present report is submitted to inform the Governing Council of the actions taken to make the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) more responsive to the growing needs of developing countries in the area of sustainable development. It also outlines a programme for assisting developing countries in the follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED).

2. Recent General Assembly resolutions (namely 44/227 and 44/228 of 22 December 1989) and decisions of the Governing Council (namely 88/57 of 1 July 1988, 89/28 of 30 June 1989 and 90/34 of 23 June 1990) serve as the basis for UNDP actions in this regard. These, and the recent deliberations of the UNCED Preparatory Committee, provide the basic framework for future planning of the enhanced role envisaged for UNDP in the post-UNCED period.

3. Sustainable development has recently become a principal focus of international concern. UNDP has for some time been involved in programmes and projects designed to attain this goal. What is relatively new is the concern for making the specific link between environment and development a central feature of all relevant programmes. The actions described in the present report are aimed at making UNDP more responsive to this crucial concern.

II. THE INCREASING DEMAND FOR UNDP SUPPORT IN ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVITIES

4. As mentioned above, UNDP's commitment to sustainable development is not new. For many decades, UNDP has worked with Governments to improve living conditions and provide better opportunities for people in developing countries. This process has very often involved the consideration of sustainability, sometimes as the main concern. In areas such as forestry, land and water management, and food production, sustainable development was both the implicit and the explicit objective. In other areas, such as poverty eradication and the improvement of health conditions, sustainable development, although not explicitly stated, was the main concern. It is estimated that UNDP now has over 630 projects, valued at approximately $700 million, in this category. UNDP plans to strengthen these efforts by making sustainable development a prominent feature of its development programmes. Developing countries face the difficult task of integrating environmental activities with development. In accepting this challenge, they have registered an increasing demand for assistance from UNDP. Thanks to its multisectoral mandate, UNDP can support developing countries in their efforts to find new ways of attaining the benefits of development while avoiding negative environmental impacts on natural resources and on the population. UNDP has traditionally focused on building national capacities and institutions and is therefore ideally placed to cooperate with countries in strengthening technical and managerial capabilities and corresponding systems and structures required to design and implement sustainable development strategies.

5. The six areas of focus on which the Governing Council has specifically mandated UNDP to concentrate, within the overall framework of national capacity-building for human development (poverty eradication and grass-roots

participation in development; environmental problems and natural resource management; management development; technical cooperation among developing countries; transfer and adaptation of technology for development; women in development) are all key elements in any strategy for sustainable development. Governments have recognized this, as demonstrated by the fact that, for the fifth cycle, approximately 80 per cent of the proposed country programmes include sustainable development as one of their main areas of concentration.

6. Finally, the active role of UNDP in the UNCED Preparatory Committee process and the major post-UNCED role envisaged for UNDP especially in the area of capacity-building and in the implementation of Agenda 21, are also contributing to a significant increase in demand for UNDP support in this area.

III. THE ROLE OF UNDP

7. The decentralized and field-based decision-making process of UNDP ensures that its role is specifically focused on supporting national priorities and building national capacities so that developing countries can take charge of their own sustainable development planning and management.

8. By incorporating environmental concerns into all its programmes, UNDP is also a major promoter of sound environmental management for human development.

9. The central position of UNDP in the United Nations development system and its role in coordination also assign UNDP the important task of ensuring that the capacities of the United Nations specialized agencies are fully utilized.

10. The environmental priorities of industrialized and developing countries differ. This sometimes obscures the fact that there are many areas of commonality and mutual interest. The balanced representation in the Governing Council and its operation by consensus gives UNDP an important potential role as an identifier and promoter of those areas of commonality, which can provide significant opportunities for international environmental collaboration.

IV. WHAT UNDP IS DOING TO MEET THE GROWING CHALLENGE

11. UNDP continues to build on a strategy based on the following features:

(a) The promotion of sound environmental management practices. Using training materials specifically designed for the needs of each developing country, UNDP will accelerate its programme to promote a strategy for sound environmental management at the field level. A training programme for national officials and project personnel involved in development programmes has now been initiated in 30 developing countries. UNDP also continues to promote public awareness and sponsor training and information dissemination programmes designed to increase the participation of women and of all sectors of civil society in the environmental decision-making process. The Sustainable Development Network (SDN) is a major effort in this regard.

(b) A new requirement that all of its programmes and projects be reviewed, appraised and, if necessary, revised to take into account environmental concerns.

(i) This requirement has been incorporated in the Policies and Procedure Manual and in the UNDP Environment Management Handbook, which have been distributed to all field offices;

(ii) Building on the mandate given by the Governing Council in decision 90/34, UNDP endeavours to promote human and sustainable development and the improvement of the global environment in the fifth cycle country and intercountry programmes. As noted previously, approximately 80 per cent of the fifth cycle country programmes will incorporate the environment and sustainable development as major areas of concentration. These new country programmes will be the major vehicles through which UNDP will assist developing countries in strengthening the links between environment and development. They will also provide excellent mechanisms for undertaking capacity-building programmes together with United Nations specialized agencies and for mobilizing resources. These will be complemented by activities at the regional and interregional levels, using indicative planning figure (IPF), Special Programme Resources (SPR) and extrabudgetary resources.

(c) Participation in initiatives in support of the global environment. Through the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the Montreal Protocol, UNDP, together with the World Bank and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), is supporting initiatives to address issues with a global environmental impact, such as global warming, biodiversity, international water pollution, and ozone depletion. In addition to co-managing the GEF, UNDP has also been actively involved in ensuring that as the Facility evolves it responds to the needs and concerns of the developing countries by addressing issues such as the scope of the GEF mandate and its governance. UNDP believes that the Facility should be flexible and democratically governed. Further, it should explicitly address issues such as (i) desertification and afforestation and (ii) land-based pollution and related water activities. UNDP sees the GEF as a component of the "green financing package" for Agenda 21, expected to emerge from UNCED. Its evolution is thus not isolated from UNCED, but must be viewed as an integral part of financing national, regional and global dimensions of sustainable development, including Agenda 21. It is for this reason that UNDP believes that the GEF should go beyond supporting activities directly linked to conventions and protocols. Equally important are the links to in-country sustainable development strategies based on national priorities. UNDP also supports the systematic involvement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and grass-roots groups in all GEF programme and project cycles. UNDP strongly supports the strengthened collaboration which has resulted from the co-management of GEF by UNEP, the World Bank and UNDP, and believes that this co-management must be maintained. The experience of the last few months has shown that the complementarity of these agencies, with their respective advantages, helps to ensure a more balanced and qualitatively more responsive programme to meet the needs of the developing countries. The partnership in

management reflected in the tripartite implementation committee also ensures that there is an adequate balance of funding for both investment and technical cooperation activities.

(d) A continued effort to strengthen its field and headquarters capacity to deal effectively with the environment. This will include the internal efficiency and coherence of the policy, technical and managerial support provided by Regional Bureaux, the Bureau for Programme and Policy Evaluation (BPPE) and other units. Significant in this regard is the creation of the Environment and Natural Resources Group within BPPE and the incorporation of full-time environmental advisers in each of the Regional Bureaux. At the field level, each field office has assigned a staff member to act as a focal point on the environment and on capacity-building issues related to sustainable development.

V. THE NEED FOR A STRENGTHENED CAPACITY

12. The demand for UNDP technical cooperation in the area of environment and sustainable development will continue to increase. The fifth cycle programmes of most countries and the deliberations of the UNCED preparatory process all point in this direction. This fact, together with the continued need for refining and adjusting the tools of technical cooperation in accordance with the concerns of sustainable development, makes it imperative for UNDP to review its internal structure and its capacity to meet growing challenges.

13. UNDP thus intends to undertake a review of its internal capacity as a basis for presentation to the Governing Council at its fortieth session (1993) with proposals to strengthen its capacity to meet the new emerging needs, especially at the field level. Included in this review will be an effort to identify better ways to coordinate the mainstreaming of activities in the areas of environment and human development.

VI. UNDP ACTIVITIES IN SUPPORT OF UNCED

14. UNDP has been an active participant in the preparatory process of UNCED. UNDP offices and the Resident Coordinators have played a central role in the national preparations for UNCED. Several technical staff also participated in the working groups, which prepared much of the documentation for the Preparatory Committee meetings. Two staff members were seconded to assist in two important areas: coordination of national activities and the role of women in agenda 21. With the Government of the Netherlands, UNDP co-sponsored a symposium of world environmental experts held in The Hague in November 1991. The deliberations of this symposium will be a significant contribution to the Earth Summit.

15. In the area of capacity-building, UNDP undertook a rapid assessment of capacity-building needs in over 80 countries. Assessments were also prepared for each region. In preparation for UNCED, UNDP held a round-table meeting on capacity-building, at which experts discussed the major needs in this area.

16. UNDP was active in the regional consultations in preparation for UNCED. In Latin America and the Caribbean, for example, in collaboration with the Inter-American Development Bank, UNDP sponsored the preparation of the

publication "Our Own Agenda", which sets forth strategies for the region. UNDP has also actively promoted and supported developing-country NGO participation in the preparatory process of UNCED. UNDP sponsored several activities and provided financial support for NGOs to participate in the UNCED preparatory meetings, to be involved in national activities leading to UNCED, and to prepare documentation and position papers for UNCED. With the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), UNDP was active in ensuring that women's issues were properly reflected in the process of preparation for UNCED and in agenda 21. With the private sector, UNDP has been actively involved with the Business Council for Sustainable Development in exploring mechanisms for private sector participation in the implementation of agenda 21, especially in the area of technology transfer.

VII. THE UNDP PROGRAMME IN SUPPORT OF AGENDA 21

17. UNDP will have a crucial role in the follow-up to UNCED. Through its network of field offices it will seek to foster the collective thrust of the United Nations system in support of the implementation of agenda 21 at the country, regional, interregional and global levels by carrying out the following tasks:

(a) Acting as lead agency in organizing United Nations system efforts toward capacity-building;

(b) Mobilizing donor resources on behalf of governments for capacity-building, where appropriate, through the round-table mechanism;

(c) Assisting countries in identifying and mobilizing domestic financial resources;

(d) Raising awareness of the important role which women play in the area of environment;

(e) Promoting the participation of all parts of civil society, particularly NGOs and the private sector.

18. UNDP support for agenda 21 will focus principally on two related areas:

(a) Helping developing countries in the preparation of national sustainable development strategies and plans; and

(b) Building capacities for sustainable development.

Resources for these activities will come from a variety of sources, including fifth cycle country programmes and the GEF. Special resource mobilization efforts will also be undertaken.

19. Sustainable development strategies. UNDP will assist countries in the preparation of national sustainable development strategies and plans. These efforts will also focus on strengthening national capacities to incorporate the environment into overall development planning and management. While in some countries this may result in the production of a national programme, UNDP support will emphasize improving the process of environmental management rather

than actually producing a document. In carrying out this task, UNDP will build on the process countries have established for their preparations for UNCED. It will seek particularly to support the continuation of the broad consultations established by many countries. It will also support the refinement of national reports into strategic national framework documents. United Nations specialized agencies will play an important role by contributing in their areas of expertise, in collaboration with UNDP.

20. Developing national capacities. One of the main constraints of developing countries in their transition to sustainable development is the lack of appropriate national capacities. In the UNCED preparatory process, governments emphasized the need to put a major effort into building national capacities in support of sustainable development. UNDP plans to focus on capacity-building programmes as its major contribution to the implementation of agenda 21. In doing this, UNDP plans to seek the advice and collaboration of United Nations specialized agencies as well as the regional development banks. In carrying out these programmes, UNDP will seek to assist by establishing national and regional consultation mechanisms for coordination and collaboration in capacity-building.

21. The capacity-building efforts will centre on four major components:

(a) Assistance to countries in the formulation of policies and legislation to support the environment and sustainable development, in close collaboration with UNEP and the United Nations specialized agencies;

(b) A human resource training component in priority areas of agenda 21 for each country;

(c) Strengthening key regional and national institutions, especially those dedicated to technological research and development in the priority areas of agenda 21;

(d) Strengthening national mechanisms for public participation of the various sectors of civil society, particularly women and NGOs. Included in this component is support for improving the flow of information and know-how in key areas of agenda 21 and on the environment in general.

22. In the area of technology transfer, UNDP will support national programmes that promote a better partnership between the public and private sectors. It will also seek to facilitate technological cooperation between industrialized and developing countries by supporting programmes that enhance the transfer of environmentally sound technologies to developing countries.

23. In implementing its environmental activities, UNDP will pay special attention to the needs, concerns and know-how of indigenous communities whose proven knowledge and skills are an important asset for the preservation of natural resources and environmental conservation. In addition to activities that will support the recovery, consolidation and dissemination of the environmental culture and practices of indigenous people, UNDP will encourage the latter's participation in resource management and conservation strategies, programmes and projects.

24. In addition to the activities supporting the promotion of women in the environment, mentioned in other paragraphs of the present report, UNDP will support measures to strengthen and empower women's bureaux, women's NGOs and women's groups in enhancing capacity-building for sustainable development. In its new small grants programme on environmental education, UNDP will provide support for education in the non-formal sector, particularly in those activities that focus on the needs and skills of women and children. UNDP will also support the establishment and daily operations of a centre on women's issues at the Earth Summit. Further, UNDP will continue to participate in the United Nations Interagency Working Group on Women, Environment and Development (WED) which was established by UNIFEM in 1991 to facilitate improved programme coordination.

25. With the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office and through national programmes, UNDP will actively participate in the implementation of the provisions of agenda 21 relating to combating drought and desertification as well as to land resource management.